HOW TO RECYCLE

The best form of recycling is "precycling", that is making waste reduction decisions at the point of purchase. If your family is new to recycling, start with one material, then add others later. Recycling takes only a few minutes a day.

Around the New Year is a good time to look in your storage spaces and pick out all clothes, small appliances, toys, books, magazines, and other items you have either outgrown or no longer have a need. Contact a local charity to whom you can donate these items.

Recycling is simply a matter of segregating items you would normally throw into the trash, placing them in a convenient container, and carrying them to your curb or nearest recycling center. Bins may be located in a pantry, under the sink, a corner, the basement, garage, carport, back porch, or anywhere that is convenient but out of the way. The care you take in separating these items will determine their value to the recycler.

Dirty, contaminated or improperly mixed materials will lower their value, making your community's program less profitable and increasing the likelihood the materials will be sent to the landfill. Of course, this will eventually affect you in the form of higher taxes and a lower quality environment.

If your neighborhood does not have curbside recycling, many people find it easy to combine their recycling runs with trips to the grocery store. This also helps you remember to avoid overpackaged goods and look for recycled content and recycled packaging when you shop. Rinsing food particles and liquids from containers with warm water will prevent problems from odors and insects. In most cases, it is not necessary to remove labels, aluminum rings, and tabs from cans and bottles, but lids should be removed.

Aluminum is the most profitable material in recycling programs. Before recycling programs begin paying for themselves, aluminum cans will often carry the weight for all the other materials. Aluminum cans can be distinguished from others by the fact that they do not attract a magnet. Lids, pieces of doors, windows, siding, gutters, or any other aluminum materials cannot be mixed with the cans. Rinse your bottles, jars, and jugs out and separate by colors: clear, amber, or green. China, ceramics, pottery, and windowpanes cannot be mixed with any kind of bottle glass.

Corrugated cardboard recycling might also include brown paper bags and some cereal boxes, although boxes with waxy coatings are not usually accepted. Boxes should be relatively clean and broken down so more can be stored in the bins. Paper often has the most complicated requirements for separation, therefore contact your recycler about specific requirements. Fortunately, the demand for post-consumer waste has gotten so high that many recycling plants have relaxed their requirements. Paper items with glue, staples, plastic, slick coatings, or cellophane should not be included with your recyclable paper. Help your recycler by properly segregating newspaper, office paper, magazines, and phone books when it is required. Steel or "tin" cans contain iron and will attract a magnet. Rinse and remove the lids before recycling. Plastic items are segregated according to the type of resin they are made from.

All recyclable plastic containers have a resin code that is a number one through seven surrounded by chasing arrows. The purpose of the resin code is to identify the resin type,

not to indicate that the container is recyclable. Do not assume that the presence of the resin code means you can recycle the container because in reality, most programs can only accept a few types of plastic. PET (1), HDPE (2) bottles and some plastic bags (4) are about the only types you can expect to recycle. PET (1) bottles are soft and clear and used for sodas. HDPE (2) bottles are hard plastic and used for milk, bleach, soap, and antifreeze. Most programs let people throw both types of bottles in the same bin. Be sure to remove lids, then rinse and flatten the bottles so more may fit in the bin.

When shopping, you may want to consider that the plastic food and beverage containers that are most often recycled are made from virgin resin, a petroleum product. Although the plastics industry is looking for ways to use recycled plastic in food and beverage containers, there is little incentive as long as crude oil prices remain low. High demand for virgin plastic resin products by consumers only increases our nation's dependence on petroleum production and all its attendant environmental, economic, and social woes.

Aluminum or glass containers might be better choices for purchase. Look for products that contain minimum packaging and are made of recycled/recyclable materials. Although a label may say the package is recyclable, there may be no place to take it in your community.

Buying items in bulk will save on packaging. Better yet, carry your own reusable bags and containers for grocery items that are sold loose. If you have a curbside-recycling program in your community, please follow those guidelines provided.